

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 TRSE-00 AID-05 FDRE-00 ACDA-12
/112 W

-----040197 131318Z /72

R 131007Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5522
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 2133

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SREF, BM, BG
SUBJECT: BURMESE-BENGALI TALKS ON CHITTAGONGIAN/ARAKAN
DISPLACED PERSONS

SUMMARY: TALKS BETWEEN THE GUB AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH CONCLUDED IN RANGOON ON JUNE 10 WITHOUT AGREEMENT. ACCORDING TO BURMESE SOURCES, THE BENGALIS CONTINUED THEIR DEMAND THAT THE BURMESE PERMIT THE RETURN OF ALL DISPLACED PERSONS, WITHOUT GUARANTEEING THAT THOSE FOUND INELIGIBLE FOR CONTINUED RESIDENCE IN BURMA WOULD BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO BANGLADESH. THE BURMESE REPORTEDLY OFFERED TO PERMIT THE RETURN OF THOSE WITH LEGAL RIGHT TO RESIDE IN BURMA AS WELL AS AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF THOSE WHO COULD ESTABLISH A LENGTHY PAST RESIDENCY--LEGAL OR ILLEGAL--IN BURMA, AND ALSO SOUGHT REPLACEMENT OF BORDER MARKERS AND BORDER DEMARCATON. THE BENGALI AMBASSADOR

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IS REPORTED TO HAVE MADE VEILED THREATS TO BURMESE NEWSMEN ON POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES TO BURMA ON THIS ISSUE; PRESIDENT NE WIN REPORTEDLY PRESSED FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS, TO BE HELD IN DACCA.
END SUMMARY

1. A NINE-MEMBER DELEGATION FROM BANGLADESH LED BY FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSSAIN VISIED BURMA FROM JUNE 6 TO 10 FOR

DISCUSSIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF CHITTAGONIANS WHO HAVE RECENTLY CROSSED INTO BANGLADESH FROM BURMA'S ARAKAN PROVINCE. THE BENGALI DELEGATION HELD THREE DAYS OF DISCUSSIONS WITH BURMESE REPRESENTATIVES LED BY DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS U TIN OHN, AND CALLED ON PRESIDENT NE WIN FOLLOWING THE FORMAL DISCUSSIONS.

2. THE DISCUSSIONS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INCONCLUSIVE. THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED BURMESE PRESS REPORTEDLY MERELY THAT "POSITIVE PROPOSALS WERE MADE BY THE BURMESE SIDE ON THE SOLUTION OF THE IMMIGRATION PROBLEM...", "THAT DISCUSSIONS ON THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE GROUND RULES TO BE AGREED BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WERE ALSO GENERALLY ENCOURAGING," AND THAT THE BURMESE SIDE PROPOSED STEPS TO CLARIFY THE BENGALI-BURMESE BORDER.

3. SOURCES CLOSE TO THE GUB REPORT THAT THE BENGALI DELEGATION PRESSED FOR PERMISSION FOR ALL RECENT DEPARTEES FROM BURMA TO RETURN, AND THAT ANY SCRUTINY OF INDIVIDUALS TO DETERMINE THEIR RIGHT TO RESIDE IN BURMA SHOULD TAKE PLACE ONLY AFTER THEIR RETURN, BUT DID NOT OFFER ASSURANCES THAT THOSE FOUND INELIGIBLE TO REMAIN IN BURMA WOULD BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO BANGLADESH. THE BENGALIS NOTED THAT UNDER BDG LAW, PERSONS RESIDENT IN BURMA PRIOR TO 1972 COULD NOT BE BANGLADESHI CITIZENS.

4. ACCORDING TO THESE SOURCES, THE BURMESE OFFERED TO PERMIT LEGAL RESIDENTS OF BURMA TO RETURN, AS WELL AS TO ALLOW AN CONFIDENTIAL

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UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF PERSONS WITH LONG RESIDENCE IN BURMA (EVEN WITHOUT PERMISSION) TO RETURN. SCRUTINY OF INDIVIDUALS MUST, HOWEVER, TAKE PLACE IN BANGLADESH, AND BURMESE RESIDENCE AND VILLAGE RECORDS WOULD BE THE BASIS FOR ANY SUCH EXAMINATION.

5. ONE SOURCE, A JOURNALIST, SAID THAT THE BANGLADESHI AMBASSADOR TO BURMA, IN CONVERSATION WITH JOURNALISTS, MADE VEILED THREATS AS TO BURMA'S PROSPECTS WERE THE DISPLACED CHITTAGONIANS TO BE KEPT IN REFUGEE CAMPS AND A PALESTINE-LIKE SITUATION BE PERMITTED (OR ENCOURAGED) TO DEVELOP, AND HINTED ABOUT CONTINUED SUPPLY OF ARMS BY THIRD PARTIES (PRESUMABLY MUSLIM COUNTRIES). THE BURMESE REPORTEDLY IN RESPONSE NOTED THAT BURMA HAS PUT UP WITH INSURGENCIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE AND ONE MORE WOULD NOT MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE.

6. THE BURMESE REPORTEDLY FEARED THE BENGALIS WOULD WELCOME A STALEMATE IN THE DISCUSSIONS AS AN EXCUSE TO CLAIM A BREAKDOWN IN NEGOTIATIONS AND UNLEASH FURTHER PROPAGANDA ATTACKS UPON THE DELEGATION'S RETURN; PRESIDENT NE WIN IS REPORTEDLY TO HAVE DELIBERATELY BUT CASUALLY PUSHED FOR FURTHER TALKS BY NOTING, DURING THE CALL ON HIM, THAT BURMA WOULD CONTINUE TO NEGOTIATE ON THIS ISSUE AND THAT HE WOULD SEND A BURMESE DELEGATION TO

DACCA IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE BENGALI AMBASSADOR REPORTEDLY CONFIRMED TO JOURNALISTS THAT FUTURE TALKS WOULD BE HELD IN DACCA AT AN UNSPECIFIED DATE, ALTHOUGH THE GUB HAS PROVIDED NO PUBLIC CONFIRMATION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 2133

7. COMMENT: THE BURMESE PROPOSALS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO SHOW SOME WILLINGNESS TO TAKE BACK SOME OF THE CHITTAGONIANS WHO FLED FROM THE ARAKAN AND TO PROVIDE A BASIS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE DIPLOMATIC PROCESS. THE BURMESE HAVE OBVIOUSLY REGARDED BENGALI BEHAVIOR ON THIS QUESTION FROM THE BEGINNING AS AN OVERREACTION, PERHAPS A DELIBERATE OVERREACTION.

8. THE BURMESE ARE DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF BDG INTENTIONS TOWARDS THE ARAKAN STATE. (THE GUB STILL PROBABLY HAS IN MIND, FOR EXAMPLE, THE INVOLVEMENT OF BANGLADESH EMBASSY MILITARY ATTACHE WITH ARAKANESE DISSIDENTS, WHICH THEY DISCOVERED IN 1977.) THEY MAINTAIN THAT THE MASS EXODUS OF REFUGEES WAS NOT WARRANTED BY THEIR LIMITED IMMIGRATION OPERATIONS (AND INDEED THE ATROCITY REPORTS COMING FROM BANGLADESH ARE TOTALLY UNSUPPORTED BY EVEN RUMORS IN RANGOON, AND THIS TOWN IS NOT WITHOUT OPPONENTS OF THE PRESENT REGIME). IF THE GUB IS OPERATING FROM THE SAME INFORMATION

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THAT HAS COME TO US FROM THE FEW OUTSIDE OBSERVERS THAT HAVE VISITED THE ARAKAN (I.E., THAT THE SCOPE OF THE EXODUS IN LARGE PART RESULTS FROM FEAR OF IMMIGRATION CHECKS RATHER THAN HAVING ENCOUNTERED GUB TROOPS AND POLICE, AND THAT THIS FEAR IS FUELED BY RELIGIOUS, COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL GROUPS, RESULTING IN PANIC AND MASS UPHEAVALS OF ENTIRE COMMUNITIES) THEN DELAY BOTH TO LET THE DUST SETTLE AND TO DETERMINE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE BDG IS POLITICALLY INVOLVED IN THESE COMMUNAL TENSIONS WOULD, IN THE GUB VIEW, BE APPROPRIATE.

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